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ABSTRACT

This guide explains how to plan, develop, and conduct a writing workshop for literacy volunteers who will be working with beginning readers. The workshop has been developed to introduce literacy volunteers to the idea of writing original supplementary reading materials, give them experience in writing with a controlled vocabulary and strict guidelines, and reinforce their knowledge of the phonic principles underlying the Laubach Way to Reading series. The first three sections discuss the purpose of the workshop, suggested topics to use in a writing workshop, and suggestions for using the workshop guidelines. Suggestions on how to critique workshop participants are outlined in the next section. The remainder of the guide presents detailed instructions for conducting 10 workshop writing activities. The following activities are included: Roseanne Keller's word thing (a brainstorming activity intended to explore the possibilities of using a controlled word list); Bea Avery's pulling words (an activity to make a word list the springboard to a story); cooperative writing; postcard; autobiography; review and reinforcements; cooperative writing in small groups; paragraph by paragraph; pass along; and an English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) supplementary lesson. (MN)

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10 GOOD WAYS TO TEACH

WRITING for NEW READERS

IN A LITERACY WORKSHOP

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TEN GOOD WAYS TO TEACH "WRITING FOR NEW READERS" IN THE LITERACY WORKSHOP

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Ten Good Ways to Teach "Writing for New Readers" in the Literacy Workshop

Purpose of "Writing for New Readers" Workshop Segment...3

What to Write About.....4

Using the Guidelines.....5

The Word List.....6

How to Critique.....7

Writing Activities.....9

- Roseanne Keller's Word Thing.....9
- Bea Avery's Pulling Words.....11
- Cooperative Writing.....13
- Postcard.....15
- Autobiography.....17
- Review and Reinforcements.....19
- Cooperative Writing in Small Groups.....22
- Paragraph by Paragraph.....24
- Pass Along.....27
- ESOL Supplementary Lesson.....30

TEN GOOD WAYS TO TEACH "WRITING FOR NEW READERS" IN THE LITERACY WORKSHOP

Purpose of "Writing for New Readers" Workshop Segment

1. To introduce the idea of writing original supplementary reading materials to trainees.

2. To give trainees experience in writing with a controlled vocabulary, following guidelines for the workshop.

3. To reinforce knowledge of the phonic principles underlying the Laubach Way to Reading series.

None of the material presented here replaces pages 319-325 in the LITERACY TRAINER HANDBOOK. You will need to prepare the workshop presentation from the HANDBOOK as you always have.

WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT

It's a cliche that is nevertheless true: Tutors must meet a student's reading needs whether the need is for daily survival or for personal pleasure. A trainer's job is to center trainees' attention on an adult student's needs. Don't encourage writing that is cute, obvious, or trivial. Stories about puppies, birds in their nests, or fish in the river are subconsciously aimed at children simply because learning to read is associated with children and because trainees haven't yet tutored an adult.

Insist, "Don't write about fishing in the river. Write on the three subjects adults find irresistible -- money, sex and death." Trainees must see students as adults with adult problems -- managing money, earning money, saving for old age -- rather than just, "He gives a quarter for the apple."

Sex includes courtship, marriage, divorce, childbirth, hate and love, not just "They get in bed."

GUIDEPOSTS magazine owes its success to stories about death and near death experiences because GUIDELINES editors know all forms of death including abandonment and rejection fascinate adults.

Push trainees to try subjects important to adults, even when writing with a very limited vocabulary. Trainees should write about things that matter to adults.

USING THE GUIDELINES

The "Introduction to Writing for New Readers" guidelines, a workshop handout, is on pages 331-333 in the LITERACY TRAINER HANDBOOK. The trainer should explain any word list numbering system and the rationale for Numbers 3, 4, and 5 on page 331, LTH.

Studies have shown that up to 60 repetitions -- hearing, reading, saying and writing -- are necessary to "own" a word. Repeating a newly introduced word (the rule of thumb is to use it five times in the 25 words that follow it) gives a student the chance to at least familiarize himself with the new word. Repeating words makes reading easier for the student.

Remind trainees that sounds are introduced sequentially and that the Skill Books are the guides. Words like about and could can be taught as sight words at any level, but the trainees must be aware that the student has no phonic attack skills for these words until the middle of Skill Book 4.

With short exercises you may postpone studying the "Introduction to Writing for New Readers" until after the practice. Many rules seem more logical after experience.

THE WORD LIST

Take time to explain the arrangement of the word list. The list usually used is "Word Selector--Skill Book 1" on page 329 of the LITERACY TRAINER HANDBOOK. Words are listed by lesson number and word function. However, a more useful list is published by "Let's Read" Literacy Press, Laubach Literacy Council of San Diego County, 1070 N. Rose, Escondido, California. The California list is alphabetical and includes all words taught in Skill Books 1, 2 and 3. Not only is the alphabetical list easier to use, but it will be useful to trainees as long as they tutor.

The words on the California list are numbered by Skill Book level and lesson number. The first number refers to the Skill Book; the second number refers to the lesson number. Lunch 2-9 means that the word lunch is introduced in Skill Book 2, lesson 9.

Writing for students necessarily uses known words -- those previously taught. So if a student is studying at the Skill Book 2, lesson 5 level, he won't be able to read lunch unless it is already in his sight vocabulary, since lunch hasn't yet been taught.

Encourage trainees to be creative and to experiment with the words, remembering that the intent is to produce supplementary reading material that is interesting and useful to the students.

HOW TO CRITIQUE

Reading stories aloud is an excellent learning process for writers. They make comparisons, see how others struggled, and reflect on how writing problems were solved. Comments and suggestions from the trainer round out the trainees' learning process.

1. Always comment positively, nonetheless honestly, on the stories.

2. Remember to discuss the writing in relation to adult reading needs. Ask what need it meets, what sort of student would be interested in the idea or information presented, and how can it be improved?

3. Make suggestions about possible uses of new words or phrases.

4. If the writing is unfinished, briefly discuss what conclusion it might have.

If you edit, illustrate, print and distribute suitable stories from the workshop, the writing segment can help the council retain tutors. Tutors whose stories have been published seldom leave the program.

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Roseanne Keller's Word Thing

Roseanne Keller, literacy writer formerly of Fairbanks, Alaska, wrote "Three Dog Night," "Two For The Road," and other titles carried by New Readers Press. Roseanne does a "Word Thing" before she begins writing. Using the "Word Thing" in the workshop lets trainees see the range of possibilities in the word list and encourages them to try combinations they might not otherwise see.

1. Choose the list you want the trainees to use and ask them to read through it.

2. Ask the group to choose one word with adult connotations that conjures up a picture -- a specific noun or an active verb. For example, the group might choose box from the Skill Book 1 Word Selector.

3. Brainstorm word and phrase combinations using the chosen word -- anything goes! As with any brainstorming session, accept any word or combination, even those you can't use. Later you can discuss which ones fit the controlled vocabulary. In this exercise you're just playing with the list. Make it fun. Ask

the group to respond spontaneously and write their suggestions on a blackboard or newsprint as they give them to you. Working as a group reassures the timid and sparks the adventurous to be inventive. (Possibilities for box include box of..., ...in a box, egg box, boxing lesson, lives in a box, up on a box.)

4. Look at and discuss the brainstorming results. What ideas do they give trainees for stories?

5. Review "Introduction to Writing for New Readers," emphasizing important points. Answer questions.

6. Give trainees a period of time to write, telling them how long they have, and that there will be a sharing time at the end of it. Reassure trainees that this is practice, therefore perfect writing isn't expected and unfinished writing is acceptable.

7. Share and critique stories during the workshop, either following the writing period, or if assigned as homework, share during the next session. Be gentle with critiques, limit them to mentioning new words, possible twists in a plot, and complimenting the writer.

Bea Avery's Pulling Words

Bea Avery helped develop the "Writing for New Readers" segment of the workshop and has trained literacy writers all over the United States. She's written "Tips for Writers," "Fun Learning" and many books for students. The California word list comes from her.

"Pulling Words" uses the word list as a springboard into a story, and again prompts trainees to see the range of writing possibilities.

1. Ask the group to think of a subject for a story. You'll get "Birds" and "Fishing" as subjects, but encourage trainees to think of other subjects too. The Word Selector--Skill Book 1 doesn't offer a lot, but try something like "Lessons," "The Man's Woman," or "Living Quarters."

2. Then look through the word list for words and phrases that might work with the subject selected. At this point take anything that's offered. After pulling the words you can talk about the difficulties in using too many new words and point out other words that will be difficult for students. But remember, sometimes the most unlikely combinations work very well in a story.

3. Start the story as a group. The first two sentences must grab attention and tell something about who the main character is, and where and when the action is happening. That's a big load, and a writer isn't always able to cram all that information in with the vocabulary available, but do the best you can. Three or four sentences is enough to get everyone started and to demonstrate how to go about writing with a controlled vocabulary.

4. Give writing time to finish the story, or assign it as homework. If you give writing time in the workshop, let trainees know how much time they have, and reassure them that the writing is practice. Trainees needn't worry about doing a perfect story. Unfinished writing is acceptable.

5. Share stories from trainees willing to read what they've written. Let each trainee finish before commenting on unnoticed new words or other weaknesses. Compliment each trainee on something -- story idea, creative use of words, sticking to the vocabulary, or aptness in meeting student needs.

6. Review "Introduction to Writing for New Readers" from LTH and answer questions.

Cooperative Writing

Occasionally a workshop group works together better than each person works alone. In that case, incorporate teamwork into the writing segment of the workshop.

1. Begin with the student. It can be a real (unnamed) student, a fictitious person, or the group can infer details from a picture you provide. Decide sex, age, job and family status of the student. Provide this information if you are short on time. Just be sure that everyone has a mental picture of an adult student.

2. Ask the group to consider what reading needs the student may have, and list them. Choose one of the needs as the basis of a story.

3. The Word Selector is too limited for this exercise, so ask trainees to open the back cover of Teacher's Manual 2 and use the words from Skill Book 2 and "City Living" along with Book 1 words. Pulling words quickly from the lists stimulates creativity and imagination, so ask trainees to call out words relating to the need selected in Number 2 above. The words need not be written down.

4. Together, begin the story. See to it that the main character is introduced and the story setting established in the first few words. Let the group take it from there, the trainer acting as a recorder only. Three paragraphs is about as much as a group can finish in the workshop.

5. Ask trainees to check each word with the word lists. Discuss changes and improvements needed. If the story isn't finished discuss what should be included before the ending and what form the ending should take.

6. Review "Introduction to Writing for New Readers" and answer questions.

Postcard

"Postcard" gives trainees practice in using "Introduction to Writing for New Readers" principles when time is limited, without trainees feeling hurried, since they finish the writing project. "Thank you" or any other note can be used instead of "Postcard."

This exercise also begins with the student, but with special attention to vocabulary development.

1. Tell the trainees about a (nonexistent) student who is away and wants to write to the family at home. (I always say the student is a 300-pound truck driver who is away three weeks at a time. He has a wife and four children. One of the children is having a birthday, or he has had an argument with his wife and wants to apologize, or another family problem exists about which he wants to write.) The reason I use a 300-pound truck driver is to reinforce the idea that the student is an adult who already knows about fishing in the river.

2. Ask the trainees what words the student will have to know in order to write his message. Check their words against those on the word list. What can he say? What can't he say at the Skill Book 1 level? List the four or five new words the group decides are most

important and discuss how they can be incorporated into a postcard message.

3. Write the message together, using new words as often as possible. Stress how difficult it is for a student to express himself when he knows so few words.

4. Discuss ways to teach the words a student needs in order to write messages. Include these suggestions:

(1) Teach new words in regular lessons, but only in simple sentences at the Skill Book 1 level.

(2) Write postcards with the new words included and mail them to the student regularly.

(3) Help the student write notes in class that include the words he or she needs to learn.

(4) Give the student file cards with a word on each card and a sentence using the word. Put no more than one new word on a card.

(5) Ask his family and friends to write to him if they are willing to structure their writing using words known by the student or needed by him.

5. Review "Introduction to Writing for New Readers" and answer questions.

Autobiography

Writing one's autobiography with the Word Selector list is a challenge but not impossible. Most trainees can find something that pertains to themselves. Requiring four sentences is reasonable, but remind trainees that what they write must be true. A trainee once wrote several impressive paragraphs with the Word Selector vocabulary, all about her children, her home and her husband. At the end she wrote, "None of this is true. I had to write what the words would let me say." Writing true sentences forces trainees to comb through the word list more carefully.

Writing four sentences with such a few words is enough to give trainees an idea of hurdles they must overcome in writing for a student, and at the same time see that it can be fun.

1. Explain which list to use and ask trainees to read through it for words that will fit some aspect of their lives. Trainees' names aren't new words since most people can read their own names.

2. Give the assignment -- each person is to write at least four true sentences about himself or herself. (Don't be swayed by protests that they can't do it; they can.)

3. Give writing time or assign the writing as homework. If trainees are to write during the workshop, let them know how much time they have, and that they will be asked to share what they've written.

4. Share autobiographies after writing or during the next workshop session. Encourage interaction within the group, noting how the same ideas can be expressed in different ways, how much can be said in a few words, and observe expressive slang idioms.

5. Discuss the limitations of students who can read and write only a few words. Elaborate on how trainees can apply principles they've learned in order to write for students. Cover student needs that a tutor might help meet by writing for a student.

6. Review "Introduction to Writing for New Readers" and answer questions.

Review and Reinforcements

There are times when tutors want to write individualized review or reinforcement exercises. Paper and pencil exercises encompass pictures (hand drawn or pasted in), examples, and instructions to the student. Writing review and reinforcement exercises is one of the most difficult of literacy writing tasks. Trainers must give trainees plenty of time and lots of individual help. This is an exercise that calls for examples -- at least eight or ten different types of review and reinforcement exercises. Collect exercises that demonstrate matching, identifying the sound, filling in blanks, choosing the correct word, counting, classifying, choosing the correct picture, games, copying, reading, answering questions.

1. Explain the assignment and have samples on display. The more samples you have, the quicker and easier trainees will understand what you want them to do. This is not an exercise you can conduct successfully without lots of different samples. Five samples of fill in the blanks and five samples of match exercises won't do it!

2. Explain which word list to use. Writing Review and Reinforcement exercises is more difficult with the Word Selector, but it can be done. There's no reason to

make this practice needlessly difficult, so use the list on the back covers of Teacher's Manual 2 and add Skill Book 2 and "City Living" words to the Word Selector. Or if using the California list, use the words for Skill Books 1, 2 and 3.

3. Discuss the requirements for a good review and reinforcement exercise.

(1) Understandable instructions for the student, or written instructions to the tutor if writing for other tutors.

(2) Pencil action must be from left to right or top to bottom if for a beginning student.

(3) Key the exercise to a specific lesson and consult the Teacher's Manual and the Skill Book to find out what reading skills are being taught at that level. Trainees won't know which skills have been previously taught, as they aren't yet familiar with the teaching materials, so don't hold them accountable for knowledge they don't have. Be satisfied if they do a good job of reviewing or reinforcing what is taught in the lesson they've chosen.

4. Give writing time in the workshop and have trainers available to give individual help and to answer questions. Tell trainees how much time they will have. It should be no less than 30 minutes and may well take up to an hour.

5. Collect the writing and critique it before sharing in the group. Give each trainee a written "critique sandwich," telling what's good, what needs improvement, and something else that's good. This is difficult writing for beginners, so stick to major problems and overlook as many faulty details as you can.

6. Choose three to five exercises to share with the group. It's best to make copies for trainees so they can look at it as you discuss the good points and where it might be improved. Concentrate on the good points.

7. Review "Introduction to Writing for New Readers" with special attention to Number 8 which can cue tutors to where extra review and reinforcement might be needed.

Cooperative Writing in Small Groups

Perhaps trainees in a particular workshop work well in small groups. The writing segment can be taught easily in small groups, but be on hand to answer questions and give help. Put no more than three people in a group. You will need at least three groups.

1. Ask each group to study one page of the "Introduction to Writing for New Readers," then to write one or two "why" questions about the rules. (For example, "Why avoid compound words?")

2. Discuss the questions; lead the trainees to discover the rationale for the rules. Limit the time allowed for this activity so writing time won't be consumed.

3. Give each group a card with a student profile written on it. Ask each group to think of three reading needs this student has. Watch the time so that most of the workshop writing segment can be spent in writing, not debating unimportant pros and cons.

4. Hand out the two opening paragraphs of a story written for an adult student. (Write it yourself when preparing your presentation or lift it from another story.) Discuss how these paragraphs are put together.

Bring up the introduction of the character, setting, clues about what's going to happen, vocabulary level, and which new words are introduced. Does it follow the guidelines you've just discussed? How -- or why not?

5. Ask each group to review the reading needs they chose and pick one as the basis of their story.

6. Explain which word list will be used and tell trainees to read the word list together before they start writing. They are to find and mark words that can be used in their writing.

7. Allow writing time in the workshop and announce that you will share what each has written. (Sharing helps to prevent silliness.)

8. Share during the workshop or the next session. Compliment writers on what they did well and give hints for improvement. If you get inappropriate writing, critique it this way: "A student probably can't make sense of this, but you did a good job with the words you had... you show imagination... you stick to what you have to say..." Be honest, but not critical. If most of the writing is silly, pick out one that has the best examples of what you are trying to teach and share that. Let the rest go with a general comment.

Paragraph by Paragraph

Stories in the workshop are hurried and writers seldom get the chance to develop a plot, or even talk about it to any degree. Dividing the story into sections and parceling it out to trainees permits a longer story to be completed. And trainees get the chance to create a more complicated story.

Like any task divided into sections, all of which are worked on simultaneously, the time for completion is shortened. This teaching exercise isn't the fastest demonstration of "Writing for New Readers," but it is quicker than asking each person to write a long story. Use it when you want to talk about story conflict, character development, descriptions, and other story elements.

1. Prepare ahead of time the outline of a story to be given to trainees as a framework for their writing. Here is an example:

The Outline	The Writing
Pablo, a poor farmer lives far from the city.	Describe Pablo -- the way he looks, his work, and his farm.
He finds a gold jar.	Tell how he found the jar and what he thinks of it.
Pablo thinks of everything he can get if he sells the jar.	Describe his daydreams.
He doesn't sell the jar. He breaks it.	Tell what happened to the jar and how he felt.

A man comes from the broken jar. He is dressed in wildly colored clothes.	Tell how the man looked, how he talked, and what his clothes were like.
The man gives Pablo three wishes.	Tell about their conversation and how Pablo feels.
Pablo wishes for a wife.	Tell what happened with Pablo and his wife.
Pablo wishes for riches.	Tell what happened when Pablo became rich.
Pablo wishes to be a poor farmer living far from the city.	Tell what happened when Pablo became a poor farmer again.

This is a folk tale familiar to everyone. A modern story can be used as well.

This story can be used with nine trainees, or combine some of the paragraphs for fewer trainees. If the workshop is large, hand out a story set for every nine people.

When writing the outline, plan the story frame so those who write the last paragraphs, or scenes, will have an idea about what's happened earlier. Then they'll be able to fit their part into the rest of the story.

The trainees may find that they can't write their part in only one paragraph, so encourage them to write as much as they need to tell what they want to say.

2. Use the word list for Skill Books 1, 2 and 3. Expect many new words, but remind trainees that the limit is 5% as stated in the "Introduction to Writing for New Readers." Ask trainees to read through the list before they begin writing, noting words that apply to their part of the story.

3. Allow writing time and if trainees aren't finished when time is up, let the homework assignment include completing the writing practice. The purpose of this kind of writing exercise is for trainees to participate in a longer story, so give them a chance to finish.

4. Putting the paragraphs together is fun yet brings home the point that to be entertaining a story must have problems to solve. A story must have a main character and lively people with whom to interact. The settings and descriptions must be apt, colorful and intriguing. Also, apparent in this exercise is the need for transitions between people, places and time.

Discuss these challenges in composition, their relation to student needs, and the possibilities with a limited vocabulary.

Pass Along

Remember the children's game where we wrote a sentence, folded the paper and passed it along to the next person who wrote another sentence without seeing the first one? "Pass Along" is a similar writing exercise, without folding the paper.

The purpose of teaching "Writing for New Readers" is to introduce trainees to the idea of writing for students, to give them some practice in writing with a controlled vocabulary, and to reinforce understanding of phonic principles underlying Laubach Way to Reading. All this can be accomplished in an atmosphere of share fun, creativity and inspiration.

"Pass Along" has an additional advantage: It is less threatening to inexperienced writers since they are asked to write sentences only, not a story or a paragraph. Yet they get as much writing practice as in the other exercises.

1. Write the first two or three sentences of a story. Introduce the main character, give him or her a name, set the story's scene, and give an idea of the problem with which the character is struggling. Write six different beginnings.

2. Divide the trainees into groups of six. Explain that they will be finishing stories that you've started, that each person will read what's been written beforehand then add one sentence to each story. Explain that the story is supposed to make sense, so trainees should write a sentence that pertains to what has already been written.

3. Explain which word list will be used. (Make sure your story beginnings fit the word list you want trainees to use.)

4. Give each trainee in the six person group a different story beginning. Ask each of them to write the sentence that will come next in the story. When the sentence is written, pass the story to the right. Proceed until all six trainees get their original story back. (Each person will write six sentences, one on all six stories.)

5. After the stories return to the first writer, ask trainees to compare words with the word list, marking each one. They may just checkmark each word, or if using the California list, put the word's number under each word. List all words not on the word list.

6. Discuss new words.

7. Lead trainees to express difficulties they may have had in writing, how others' writing helped, unexpected changes in plot, and what different things they considered when writing the first and last sentences.

8. Review "Introduction to Writing for New Readers" and answer questions.

ESOL SUPPLEMENTARY LESSON

In an ESOL workshop, teaching trainees how to write a supplementary lesson is more helpful than the traditional "Writing for New Readers." Allow more time for writing a supplementary lesson -- at least an hour.

Review the needs for supplementary lessons. Give trainees a student profile, either real or imagined. Ask them to decide what kind of supplementary lesson this student will need.

Review the six parts of an ESOL lesson: (1) Useful dialog, (2) Vocabulary development, (3) Structure focus, (4) Pronunciation drill, (5) Reading, (6) Writing. In creating a supplementary lesson, trainees, for the first time, thoroughly understand the inter-related parts of the ESOL lesson.

Do this exercise as a group.

After discussing the student's speaking, reading and writing needs, decide as a group the content of a supplementary lesson. (The group will want to cover too much in one lesson, but as you go along, they will discover how to break information into smaller bits. It's not necessary to belabor that point now.)

1. Lead trainees in discussing the first two sections of the lesson -- dialog and vocabulary. What kind of dialog does this student need to practice? What questions must be asked? What answers given? What new words must be learned? Are they verbs or nouns? List them in order of essential, important, good to know. Separate nouns from verbs.

2. Write the dialog together. Remind them that a dialog is like a telephone conversation. Have two trainees try the dialog to see if sounds like a real conversation. Remind trainees that dialog doesn't have to be controlled vocabulary, but the student does have to understand through the dialog what he's talking about. If actions (opening a door, standing up, shaking hands, or something else) are called for, indicate them in the tutor's instructions.

3. Write the vocabulary practice. For nouns, use the framework from Laubach Way to English -- "This is a..."

Refer to LWE for vocabulary formats that demonstrate verb forms similar to those in the new lesson. Many vocabulary verb practices begin with a pronoun or person-noun: "I am..." or "The woman is..." or "Uncle Ted was..."

4. Discuss the purpose of structure focus -- practicing sentence parts -- and help trainees choose a simple slot substitution or transformation drill for structure focus. See Lesson 5, LWE for examples of structure focus substitution drills and Lesson 6, LWE for examples of structure focus transformation drills.

Be sure trainees don't confuse structure focus drills with vocabulary drills. Structure focus practices sentence parts. Vocabulary teaches new words.

5. The pronunciation drill may be practice on pronouncing new words or patterned after the Unit D pronunciation drill, LWE, omitting its Step 3.

Encourage trainees to examine new words carefully for sounds or sound combinations that can be used in pronunciation practice. For example, meat, meal; peas, peach; beans, beet; or potato, tomato; post, toast. (The pronunciation drill is ear training so the student never sees words during this drill. Sounds, not spelling, are the only consideration.)

6. Most ESOL supplementary lessons end with 5. above. However, if there is time, have trainees prepare a lesson chart like those in the Skill Books. Pictures may be sketched or magazine pictures cut to

size and pasted in. Some words, adjectives or adverbs, may not have pictures. (See charts in Skill Book 3 and 4.) Do not divide words into syllables. The words will be taught as sight words, just as they were in the first six lessons of Skill Book 1.

7. Help the trainees write a cooperative story using the new words in a story setting that pertains to the subject chosen for the supplementary lesson. Follow the guidelines in "Introduction to Writing for New Readers."

8. Develop a writing lesson patterned after those in the Skill Book at the student's reading level.